

5/24/2004 This Week In Congress

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May 24, 2004

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Presidents Bush, Clinton Come to Kansas

May 17 marked the 50th anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court decision in Brown versus the Topeka Board of Education, which allowed for the desegregation of public schools. President George W. Bush visited our state to recognize this anniversary and to attend the grand opening of the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site at Monroe Elementary School in Topeka. Joining in the commemoration were the entire Kansas congressional delegation, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist and other national leaders.

We must never lose sight of the importance of Brown versus the Topeka Board of Education. This decision led the way to changing inequality in our society. Even today, disparities exist among groups of students, and we must continue working to ensure that all students are learning what they need to learn, and are receiving the kind of high-quality education they deserve.

I also addressed the U.S. House of Representatives about the importance of this anniversary. A full copy of the speech can be found at:

[http://www.house.gov/apps/list/speech/
ks01_moran/sp051704BrownvBoard.html](http://www.house.gov/apps/list/speech/ks01_moran/sp051704BrownvBoard.html)

Also this week, I joined a crowd of more than 12,000 people at Allen Fieldhouse in Lawrence to hear former President Bill Clinton speak at the inaugural lecture of the Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics. Senator Dole opened the lecture in his usual fashion - with humor. At the personal invitation of Senator Dole, President Clinton spoke about increasing partisanship in Congress, which can be seen trickling down to our state governments. I am a strong supporter of the Dole Institute, designed as a medium for discourse to bring civility to politics and honor to service, and I look forward to future lectures.

Reviewing 2002 Farm Bill

As the Chairman of the House Agriculture Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management, I chaired a mid-term review of the 2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act on Thursday. The hearing marked the second anniversary of the 2002 Farm Bill - a comprehensive law that has worked to return income stability to U.S. farmers. The subcommittee heard from officials from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as well as national farm and commodity organizations. The hearing reviewed policies within the legislation as well as the performance of the farm programs.

Although there was broad support for the current farm bill, concern was expressed over the consequences of weather-related production losses. Loss of farm income due to multi-year disaster must be addressed in future farm policy, partially through changes in crop insurance. In addition, witnesses indicated that, because commodity prices are higher, we are spending less on farm programs. This is good news for our farmers as well as for American taxpayers.

In addition to the hearing this week, some members of the House Agriculture Committee and I met with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Undersecretary of Marketing and Regulator Programs, Bill Hawks, and Undersecretary for Food Safety and Inspection Service Elsa Murano, to discuss why the USDA allowed the imports of beef from Canada, despite a current ban. While there is no legitimate concern about the safety of the U.S. food supply, the credibility of USDA is at stake - they often say one thing and do another. My colleagues and I will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that the safety of American consumers is not jeopardized by unenforced regulations.

House Passage of 2005 Budget

On Wednesday, I supported House passage of the conference report for the 2005 budget resolution. This resolution gives Congress guidelines on spending for the next year. This budget works to limit overall federal spending and also begins to pay down the national debt. This is done by limiting new spending and tax cuts that are not fully-funded. Our children and grandchildren should not be saddled with debt created today. As Congress considers future spending, I will continue to support legislation that is fiscally responsible.

Improving National Defense

On Thursday, I supported House passage of legislation that would increase military pay and improve funding for housing and facilities on military installations in Kansas. H.R. 4200, The National Defense Authorization Act of 2005, lays the groundwork for the defense appropriations process. A conference committee will now work out the differences between the House and Senate-passed versions of this legislation.

The Defense Authorization Act includes an average 3.5 percent pay raise for military personnel and increases the pay for those serving in a combat zone, or in direct support of a combat zone, from \$300 to \$750 per month. It also allows up to \$3,000 per month for reservists who may experience a pay reduction from their regular job when they are called to active duty. The legislation also eliminates the out-of-pocket housing expenses for military personnel.

In addition, the legislation authorizes funding for several Kansas projects, including:

- \$7.451 million to construct the Army Reserve Facility in Hays
- \$33 million to replace family housing at Ft. Riley
- \$41 million for construction of new barracks at Ft. Riley
- \$3.05 million for a new communication center at Ft. Riley

Our Kansas soldiers are deployed in many dangerous parts of the world, which is why we must provide our troops with better housing and better pay. The freedoms that Americans are able to enjoy exist because of the selfless sacrifices of our men and women in uniform. If we are to continue to have the strongest military in the world, we must continue to increase the compensation for our soldiers.

Improvement of Survivor Benefit Plan

Passage of The National Defense Authorization Act of 2005 also includes improvements for the Survivor Benefit Plan for military survivors. This legislation will phase out the current reduction in benefits for surviving spouses aged 62 and older. Under this legislation, Survivor Benefit Plan annuities will be restored over the next four years, bringing the percentage from the current 35 percent level up to 55 percent.

As a cosponsor of both H.R. 548 and H.R. 3763, the Military Survivor Benefits Improvement Acts of 2003 and 2004, I am pleased that Congress is making progress on this important issue. Military survivors have made a great sacrifice for this nation, and they deserve the retirement benefits that their spouses earned serving their country.

Bringing More Nurses to VA Facilities

The House Veterans Affairs Committee approved legislation on Wednesday that would allow state and federal Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities to hire more nurses. With the decrease in the VA nursing population, it is important that Congress continues to find ways to provide the best possible nursing care to our veterans. H.R. 4231, the Department of Veterans Affairs Nurse Recruitment and Retention Act, would encourage the VA to hire and promote nurses with associate's degrees or other certifications at VA facilities. This legislation may now be considered by the House.

Expanding the Child Tax Credit

On May 20, I supported House passage of H.R. 4359, the Child Credit Preservation and Expansion Act of 2004. Last year, I supported legislation that increased the child tax credit from \$600 to \$1,000. H.R. 4359 makes this increase permanent and also aims to help more families by broadening the range of incomes eligible for the tax credit. It is estimated that 453,707 children in Kansas will benefit from the child tax credit, and 47.4 million children will benefit nationwide. This legislation now moves to the Senate for consideration.

Recognized by the National Community Pharmacists Association

On Tuesday morning, I was honored to be recognized at the 36th Annual National Community Pharmacists Association Conference in Washington, D.C for my involvement in promoting our rural pharmacists. The group was gracious to honor me as chairman of the Congressional Rural Health Care Coalition during the Medicare debate and the coalition's efforts to try to protect our local pharmacies throughout the implementation of the prescription drug bill. Independent community pharmacies are a strong part of our health care delivery system and a significant part of local economies. Our seniors, especially, benefit from the one-on-one, personal counseling of a community pharmacist, and it is important that legislation in Congress not make their jobs back home more difficult.

Congress Honors WWII Veterans

Under the leadership of Senator Pat Roberts, this week the Senate passed the congressional resolution that honors World War II veterans and the completion of the National World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. I introduced the resolution, H.Con.Res. 409, which passed the House earlier this month. I appreciate the efforts of Senator Roberts to help pass a congressional resolution that honors all those who fought, died and were steadfast in their support of our troops and our country during World War II.

In the Office

In the office this week to discuss improving access to health insurance and Medicare were members of the Kansas Optometric Association, including Troy Maydew of Pratt, Gary Robbins of Topeka and Mark Norris of Leavenworth. Chuck Elsea, President of the Transportation, Elevator and Grain Merchants Association of Salina, was in to talk about improving the transportation necessary to ship grain.

Members of the Kansas Association of Community Pharmacists, including Bob and Janie Nyquist of Lindsborg, Peter Stern of Topeka, Mark Feemaster of Arkansas City, Max Heidrick of Beloit, Eric Witmer of Phillipsburg, Terry Kepka of Ellsworth, and Merlin McFarland of Kingman, were in to talk about pharmacy and health care legislation. Dr. Verlin Janzen of Hutchinson was in to discuss improving health care services for veterans and funding for residency programs.

Improving rural communications and service were the topics of discussion when I met with Catherine Moyer and Richard Veach of Ulysses, Larry Sevier of Lenora, Archie Macias of Udall, Carl Krehbiel of Moundridge and Donna Sweet of Wichita, all representatives of Kansas Telecom.

In for a tour of the Capitol this week were The Honorable Tom and Suzy Tuggle of Concordia.

Very truly yours,

Jerry